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DALY CITY HISTORY

by

George Kirchhubel

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It was a few years after the San Francisco earthquake and fire, an early Sunday morning. For these hardy men this was their day. They had worked their sixty hour week, Monday through Saturday, and now on this their day of recreation they were headed for where the action was.

About a mile south of the San Francisco County line down old Mission Road was the site of the Union Coursing Park. Here the greyhounds and whippits chased the live hare and the public wagered on the outcome. They came by streetcars, buggies, buckboards, carriages, and some even by horseless carriages. Alongside the western end of the park, the Southern Pacific Railroad had installed a spur siding, and there the trains uncoupled the passenger cars for the day.

So you may be better acquainted as to the location of the park, it was located in what is now the lower half of the Jefferson High School, extending from Citrus Avenue on the north, to School Street on the south.

The racing got off to an early start this Sunday, and as each event began and ended, the gold and silver changed hands. When the last pair of dogs had broken from their slips, and the chase was ended, the morning and racing came to an end. Now it was time to "wet the whistle," and put on the "nose or feed bag." So the great majority of them proceeded to Mission Street to their favorite saloon, and Mission Street had a good many saloons in those days, starting with the Abbey House on top of the hill, to the Lawndale next to Millets Hotel and world famous training quarters adjacent to the cemeteries. Each saloon was famous for its special Sunday dinner, and each out did the other with special dishes it was noted for. There was also the free lunch for those looking for a snack. This

consisted of various cuts of meats and cheeses together with a variety of sliced breads. Many an old timer has said that this was the finest mile and a half of eating and drinking found anywhere in the country.

The saloons were enjoying a banner day this Sunday. Many people were stopping off on their way to the fights being held later in the afternoon, in Colma, featuring a twenty round main event between two nationally known boxers. This contest had created state-wide interest and considerable controversy as to who was the better man. Many sharpies had their men stationed in the saloons taking wagers on the man they fancied to win.

As fight time neared, the saloons began to empty, and now it was off to Mateo Street near Market to the Colma Fight Arena.

As the crowd kept gathering inside the arena, there was no mistaking that this fight would be a sellout. By the time the curtain raiser got under way every seat in the auditorium was filled. After four rounds of brisk fighting then came the special event. This also was a dandy, and after the semi-windup provided more pleasing action, the crowd was now in fine fettle, as they sat back in their seats to await what they had come to see, The Main Event.

Soon both fighters emerged from their dressing rooms and walked down the aisle to the ring. There one followed the other up the three little steps and through the ropes. First one, then the other took a turn shuffling his feet in the rosin box to insure against slipping on the canvas. This chore completed, each boxer went to his corner. By this time the ring was filled with celebrities. After the announcer introduced them to the audience as each received a nice hand they returned to their seats.

And now the announcer placed the megaphone to his lips and introduced the fighters to the audience, also the referee for the fight, James Sullivan.

Sullivan motioned both boxers to the center of the rings, and there gave them instructions as to how the fight was to be conducted under the existing rules. When he had finished he told them to go to their respective corners and come out fighting at the bell.

When the second hand of the timekeeper's watch reached the zero mark, he raised his hammer and struck the gong. The fight was now on.

From the minute the bell rang, and as the fight progressed, it was evident that one of the boxers was far superior to the other, and at the conclusion of the twenty rounds he had administered a thorough beating to his adversary. Then to the complete surprise to everyone Sullivan raised the hand of the apparent loser as the victor. For a moment the crowd was stunned. Immediately pandemonium broke loose. What had been an orderly and pleasant crowd was transformed into a howling and bitter mob. The boos and cat calls resounded through the auditorium. The whole arena was filled with electricity.

Seeing the crowds reaction, Sullivan in one movement was through the ropes and down the aisle to the exit door. Someone threw the water bucket at him, another a stool, and immediately a voice hollered out, "Duck, Sullivan," a name he would be known by for the rest of his life.

An attendant had just started opening the exit door as Sullivan reached there. Grabbing the outside handle he swung the door inwardly

thereby closing it. The crowd surging in after him formed a solid barrier making it impossible to leave or enter.

George Krehl a deputized officer under Constable Carrol and the only peace officer there on this occasion, had left the auditorium at the time of the decision. He had gotten a glimpse of the crowds reaction, and as Sullivan went to run to Mission Street, he hollered to him, "Cut through the lots to San Pedro Avenue, Sullivan, and go to Salada Beach. Stop at the first farm house on the right when you get there and tell them I sent you. I'll tell them you went the other way. Get going, these people are mad and there's no telling what they will do."

Inside the arena all hell was breaking loose. Seats, benches, chairs, even the dressing rooms and the ring were destroyed. Fist fights were going on all over the place, and when it was over, what had once been a beautiful well seated arena, was now a shamble. All that was left was a mass of firewood and rubble, and what had been a lot of dudes dressed in their best Sunday go to meeting clothes, were going home a disheveled mess. Shiners, bloody noses, cuts, bruises and torn clothing were the style of the day. All in all, this made for a complete Sunday.

The fight, the decision, and the aftermath made reams of copy. The newspapers contended, and rightly so, to the lack of police protection. The doors swinging inwardly could have had disastrous results. Had there been an emergency, such as a fire, there could well have been a major disaster.

The matter finally reached the Legislature. That body decided such contests must be held in arenas that could provide sufficient protection.

Seeing the handwriting on the wall, and with boxing already in trouble in San Francisco, James J. (Sunny Jim) Cofforth, the fight promoter decided to finance a campaign to incorporate the town of Vista Grande into a city. The city to be named Daly City, in honor of his long time friend, cattleman, and rancher, John Daly.

Vista Grande at this time was a town of some two thousand people, made up mostly of refugees from the earthquake and fire. It consisted of the Crocker, Abbey, Hillcrest, Mission, Vista Grande #1, and Vista Grande #2 tracts.

After all the necessary procedures were completed to qualify the incorporation, an incorporation election was ordered to be held on March 18, 1911, at #14 Hillcrest Drive, along with a slate of five councilmen. The polling place was the upstairs backroom of John Letlos Restaurant on Mission Road. For the voting day the Supervisors had ordered the room sealed off from the restaurant.

To many people today it may seem strange that an area as large as Vista Grande should have only one voting precinct, but in those days the men were the only voters, and their work was in San Francisco. The mode of transportation was the streetcar, and the people of the Vista Grande, Knowles, Mission and Hillcrest tracts boarded the car either at the Knowles Avenue switchback on Mission Street or at the waiting station at the top of the hill, opposite Hillcrest Drive. The people from the Crocker Tract with the exception of a very few living in the far west end got the streetcar at either Templeton, Evergreen or Crocker Avenue, so

the farthest they had to walk to the precinct was three blocks, which in those days was hardly anything, even to a woman carrying two babies, one in her arms.

There is little doubt that a more vigorous, thorough campaign was ever conducted in this area. Opposition to the incorporation had sprung up and there were just as many reasons against the incorporation as there were for. No one would make any predictions as to the outcome, and when election day finally came both sides were ready to get their vote.

And so on this day of March 18th they started voting early, and it continued through the day, with the voting very heavy after working hours. When finally the polls were closed nearly every registered voter had voted. Whatever the outcome of the election, the result would be a true expression by the people.

Then began the canvass of the ballots. The inspector took out the key from his pocket, and opened the ballot box. He turned the can upside down, then emptied the ballots on the table. As he counted #1, he placed the ballot inside the can again. This followed on until the last ballot in the can counted was 262. This checking with the roster of citizens voted, the tallying was now ready to take place.

As the inspector watched, the judge reached into the can and opened the first ballot for recording. Then followed one of the most sea-saw battles ever seen in this neck of the woods. First the annexation was ahead, then the annexation was behind. This continued with absolute silence prevailing throughout the room from the onlookers. As the count

was nearing the very end the judge read one of the last ballots, "against the annexation." "Tally," said the clerks, meaning the diagonal crossing of four straight lines, that meant five. Everyone in the room knew that the count was 130 votes for. He then opened the next ballot, "against." "Tally," said the clerks. Now the vote was 130 for and 130 against.

There were only two ballots left. One vote against, and the annexation would be beaten. Again the judge reached far down into the can. Slowly his hands came up with the ballot. They were not as steady as they had been at the start of the count, no one was blaming him. He took a deep breath as he opened the ballot, and recorded it in a firm voice, "For the Annexation." A big sigh was heard in the place, whether it was relief, or frustration depended on the view point of the individual. And now here was the teller. In a flash the judge had the ballot in his hands, and unfolding it. The inspector was looking over his shoulder and everyone was straining to see which way it was cast. His mouth opened and the word "For" was all that could be heard, for immediately the room was full of shouting, hand shaking and jumping with joy. As though there were instant television, the bartender across the street, in Knowles saloon, ran out with his shotgun and fired two shots. He shouted, "Drinks on the house, the Annexation wins." There followed up and down the street two shots from every saloon, the signal that the annexation had been successful.

For this occasion the drinks were on the house, someone picked up the tab, and nobody cared. There followed a night of celebration perhaps never equaled in the city. All night, and early morning. I can still

remember that night. All night and early morning shots were being fired, people celebrated in the streets, it was like Chinese New Year in China-town. When at last the town seemed to have settled, some drunk would come home, go into the house and get his gun and fire two shots and holler at the top of his lungs, "Hooray for the Annexation." The whole procedure then started all over again. When at long last came the dawn, all was quiet, and it was back again to work.

The City of Daly City was now on its way. The first City Council met in an old store on 612 Mission Road that also served as the Post Office. One of the first matters of business passed by the Council was the appoint-ment of James Sullivan as Sewer Inspector, and Pound Man.

The city provided Sullivan with a cottage and a piece of ground for the pound, located about a block from Mission Street, in the Mission Tract area. Around the outside of the land he built a wooden corral to house the larger animals, and inside wire meshed sections for the smaller ones.

Sometime later Sullivan went to the Reichardt Duck Farm, in Colma, and there he purchased some newly hatched ducklets. Immediately, he started to train them. Whether this man had a certain gift, or a know how, or whether it was just plain persistence, or all of these and others, his efforts began to pay off. All over town stories were going around about Sullivan and his trained ducks.

A little over a block on Mission Street was the Vista Grande Theatre. To us kids it was the nickleodeon, and on Sunday this was the

big day in our life when we had a nickle and could see the Sunday Matinee starting at 2 o'clock. And now on this particular Sunday the word was out that Sullivan was going to put on a performance with his ducks just before the theatre opened.

By one o'clock people were gathered on both sides of the street in front of the pound. By 1:30 they were lined four and five deep about 100' each way. Now the talk was going around that there wasn't going to be any show, there were no trained ducks, and that this was a promotional scheme put up by the show people. At last a group got one man to see Sullivan and act as their spokesman. He opened the gate and went to the door and knocked. Sullivan ushered him into the house, and soon he came out and told them, "Sullivan just got through with his lunch and soon as he puts away the dishes he will put on his show."

Soon Sullivan came out of the house and flicking a toothpick from his mouth, he went to where the ducks were, and opened their pen. He then aligned them one in back of the other in single formation. When he was satisfied, he put a hand to his mouth as though to say don't move. Then stationing himself in front of the front duck, he asked someone to open the gate. He then placed a police whistle in his mouth and raising his right hand in the air he gave a peep from the whistle and marched out of the pound with all the splendor of a Royal Palace Guard. And here came the ducks after him, in perfect alignment. When he had gotten about five feet into the street, he gave another peep from his whistle and negotiating

a perfect right turn, he marched down the street. Each duck then followed, coming up to the spot where he had turned and then taking after Sullivan still in single file. About fifty feet down the street he made a snappy left to the other side of the street, and then another left and marched up the street toward Mission. The ducks repeated the same maneuvers as the first, just as though they could read his very mind. And you can bet the people were going wild, with their eyes opened wide in awe and disbelief. But Sullivan had still another treat in store for them. When he had reached a point about fifty feet from the rear of the show he again made a left, and when he passed about twelve feet from the center of the street he came to a halt. The ducks stopped, then Sullivan putting his hands palms downward motioning them to remain in this position. He then took a position in front of the ducks. A peep from his whistle and the ducks moved to face him. Then doing a snappy out face, with a click of the heels, he blew his whistle and marched down the street. Now the ducks were spread out keeping the distance away from him that he had taught them. When he had gotten a ways down the street he increased the pace. Now the ducks were running to their utmost, and in doing so it was necessary for them to spread their wings, and a great sight it was to see the ducks enjoying themselves, a honking and a quacking, while the crowd went wild. As they came down the street spread out wing to wing it seemed as though a small white wave was about to break over the shore.

When Sullivan reached a spot opposite to the entrance of the pound, he came to a stop. Taking a position in front of the first duck

he blew his whistle, proceeded into the pound with the ducks following. Once inside the pound he closed the gate, and then going into the pen enclosure he reached on top of one of the pens on which he had placed a sack of grain and reaching in he came out with several handfulls and rewarded them generously.

As he came out from the pen the people were cheering him lustily. But there must have been a little ham in Sullivan for as he listened, he put one hand on his ear, as though something were missing. Then to three hip, hip, hoorays for "Duck Sullivan," a wide grin came over his face, he nodded approval and returned into his house.

Although it did not occur to me at this time, perhaps because of my age, yet as I later reflected upon this last incident, this may have been the most important moment in this man's life. The next paragraph may give you a better insight.

As we were walking up the street to the show, a little boy much younger than me, asked his father, "Papa, is that why they call him Duck Sullivan?" His father answered him, "Someday boy, you can tell the people that you saw it yourself, what this man can do with animals. Yes, that's why he is called "Duck Sullivan."

And this is how a city was born, and a little man who in no small way was responsible for that city's birth, because of a bad decision made by him as a fight referee, and who because of that decision was given the nickname of "Duck Sullivan" that was intended to be a reminder and a stigma to wear for the rest of his life, turned that nickname into one of the most respected and honored names of that city.

To give you an idea of the high esteem that this man was held in by the people of Daly City an event took place following one of his later showings of the ducks. Quite a group of men had gathered at Ryan's Hall on the corner of Knowles and Miriam Streets and were discussing him. One of them said, "You know if we were to look all over this country, we could never find another man like Duck Sullivan." And another replying, "Yes, but we got him here with us, and let's see to it that we keep him with us always." To a man they said, "You said it for me." That's how I feel.

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